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ABSTRACT

The reading preparation program at Illinois State University represents a fundamental shift in the instructional focus for preservice preparation of secondary level teachers. The competency-based program in reading is largely self-directed and self-paced. Large groups of students are assigned to an instructional team, and the faculty provides non-required classes on a rotating basis four days a week and are available for individual instruction. Eighteen learning packages contain (1) instructional objectives which state behaviorally what is expected of the student, (2) questions to be answered to guide the student through learning activities, (3) required learning activities which consist of readings, audiovisual materials, and exercises to help the student reach the instructional objectives, (4) optional learning activities which provide supplementary materials for students who have difficulty with required materials, and (5) evaluation materials such as objective tests and other exercises for evaluating the students' progress. One unique feature of the program is the Learning Lab in which a student listens to taped learning material at a rate he controls. Success or non-success in the program is based upon the individual attainment of proficiency over specified instructional objectives. (AL)

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COMPETENCY-BASED READING PREPARATION FOR SECONDARY TEACHERS

Session: PREPARING READING TEACHERS: SECONDARY

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CS 000 005

Historical Trend

Educators have recognized for many years the necessity for providing continued reading instruction for secondary level students. Unfortunately, teacher education institutions have not always been as responsive as they might have been to this need. Historically, teacher education institutions have attempted to provide their secondary level preservice teachers with the knowledge and skills related to helping their secondary students with their reading problems by providing either short units within an existing methods course or by offering a separate course.

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Certification Requirements

At Illinois State University, all undergraduates in the secondary school teacher education program are required for certification to take a two credit hour course designed to familiarize them with the scope and nature of secondary level reading problems. Traditionally, this two hour course, Secondary School Reading, has been taught as a separate course by a member of the Reading area of the Department of Education. Over the past three years, however, the Reading area faculty have reorganized the content and skills of Secondary School Reading to facilitate the movement of secondary level reading instruction from a course-centered structure to a teaching-learning structure that is competency-based.

Theoretical Base

The current secondary school reading program is designed specifically as a competency-based program. Success or non-success in the program is based upon the individual attainment of proficiency over specified instructional objectives in the reading area. This competency-based program is based upon the General Model of Instruction. The General Model of Instruction is a procedural guide for designing and conducting instruction. The major philosophical assumption of the GMI is that the goal of instruction is to maximize the efficiency with which all students achieve specified instructional objectives. The model is based upon a technology of instruction developed over the past several years from research and development work in experimental

psychology, military training, and programmed instruction. The two major functions of the model are: 1) to guide instructional designers and teachers through the major steps in designing and carrying out instruction; and 2) to provide an overall structure with which to view and study the instructional process.*

Overview of the Program

The competency-based program in reading is only one element in the entire competency-based program required of pre-service secondary school teachers at Illinois State University. The Sequence (The entire program is called the Professional Sequence), consisting of eleven hours of course work, also includes four hours of credit in a methods course, a two hour background course in education, and a three hour course in educational psychology. Thus, if a student enrolled in the secondary program before it moved to its present structure, he would have taken the following courses:

Secondary School Reading	2 hours
Secondary Education	4 hours
American Public Education	2 hours
Educational Psychology	3 hours

The Sequence is made up of approximately eighty instructional packages which are described in some detail in a subsequent section. The basic premises of the Sequence include the following: (1) students should be allowed to work at their own pace; (2) students should not be required to attend any classes unless they so desire or unless they call

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*Robert J. Kibler, Behavioral Objectives and Instruction. (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1970) pp. 18-20.

for the class themselves; (3) when a student finishes a package, he should be able to take a test without having to wait for others; (4) the material should be so structured that information is not repeated unless the repetition is necessary to reinforce knowledge; (5) the required material should be that portion of total material the faculty agrees is a necessary part of the teacher education program; (6) students should reach a proficiency level that would normally be equivalent to a B grade before they are given credit for any particular package.

At the beginning of the semester, students meet en masse (this semester, each of the eight groups was made up of approximately 225 students) for four hours to receive an introduction to the sequence and to fill out the necessary forms. The students are then shown a series of slides which provides them with an overview of the entire Sequence. Students are then assigned to an instructional team. Five-member teams are made up of one specialist in the area of educational psychology, three specialists in secondary methods and background, and a reading area specialist.

Following the initial meetings, the faculty provide non-required classes on a rotating basis four days per week. Faculty are available for individual instruction or counseling for at least eight hours per week in addition to regular office hours.

Learning Package Components

The eighty instructional packages that are included in the book called The Professional Sequence Guide are composed of the following

elements:

Instructional Objectives

Questions to be Answered

Learning Activities -- Required

Learning Activities -- Optional

Evaluation

Each package is given a particular number (the reading packages are numbered 0301 through 0319) and assigned a number of merits equal to the approximate number of hours required to complete that package. Each of the above elements are now looked at individually.

Instructional Objectives

The instructional objectives constitute the core of the learning packages. These objectives are stated in behavioral terms and are intended to provide the student with a precise knowledge of what is expected of him. The instructional objectives specify what the student must do as he works on the objective and the level of proficiency required for him to complete the objective successfully. Every following element in the learning package must be constructed to maximize the potential of the student to complete the objective. In brief, the instructional objective dictates the selection of study questions, learning activities, and the final evaluation. Sample instructional objectives include:

> Given information about test administration and evaluation, the student will be able to administer to at least one student and to evaluate the results of either the Nelson-Denny or the Stanford Achievement Test: Reading. The

student will demonstrate his proficiency by completing an evaluation form and submitting it for Pass/No Pass scoring.

Given materials related to aids to reading in the content fields, the student will be able to identify the nature and the function of Assignment-Readiness, SQ3R Study Procedures, and Reading-Study Skills by achieving 80% accuracy on an objective test over the material.

Questions to be Answered

Each instructional objective is followed by a section identified as Questions to be Answered. The purpose of this section is to guide the student through the learning activities so that he can obtain the information that will facilitate his meeting the objective. This section directs the student's attention in his reading of professional articles to those points that are relevant to the attainment of the objective. If the learning activities contain videotapes, audiotapes, or tape-slides, questions are also asked to guide the acquisition of this knowledge. In brief, this section directs the student's attention toward the information he must know. Sample questions include:

What are the basic characteristics of the teaching of the language-experience approach to reading?

In what ways are the approaches to reading related to reading at the secondary school level?

What standardized tests are available to measure the reading ability of secondary school students?

Are there differences in what standardized reading tests measure?

Learning Activites - Required

Following the questions is the section labeled Learning Activities - Required. This section is designed to list readings, audio-visual materials, or exercises that will specifically help the student reach the instructional objective. Since few books contain all of the materials one would like students to become acquainted with in the area of secondary school reading, the students are not required to purchase one text book to complete their nineteen objective packages. Instead, multiple copies of many books are made available in the library so students can read the required articles at their leisure. Loose-leaf materials are also kept on file in the library to help the students through the learning activities.

When the material for the learning activity is available through a tape, a tape-slide, or a filmstrip, a typescript of the tape is also made available to the student so that he may chose the sensory approach most satisfactory to his style of learning.

The audio-visual materials are made available in a room called the Learning Lab, a converted language laboratory. Here a student goes to a carrel, punches in his social security number and the number of the program desired (e.g., #24, "Standardized Reading Tests: Basic Information"), waits for the program to be duplicated for his own use, and then has complete control of the program. The controls allow him to stop the program and back it up if it is moving too quickly or to push the fast forward button if it is moving too slowly. In any case, he has complete control and is not governed by any other student's progress. This random access system developed by AMPEX is relatively unique nationwide.

Illinois State University was the first university to use this system for a teacher education program.

Some examples of required learning activities follow:

1. Read the article by Hafner, Lawrence E., "The Uses of Reading and the Need for Reading Instruction," in Improving Reading in Secondary Schools, pp. 2-13. In the North Reserve Room of Milner Library.

2. Listen to the audiotape "Assessment of Reading Readiness" in the Learning Lab, Edwards Hall 201.

OR

Read the typescript under the same title in the Professional Sequence file in the North Reserve Room.

3. Observe the videotape "The Analysis of Reading Performance" in the Learning Lab, Edwards Hall 201.

Learning Activities - Optional

The materials presented in this section are quite similar to those in the previous section. The main difference is that when students move through the required materials and find some difficulty in learning from that presentation, some optional materials must be made available. These optional materials either present the information in a different way or provide new information that will eventually lead to the same goal. Examples of optional learning activities follow the same format as those of the required activities and therefore are not included.

Evaluation

Of the eighteen regular packages in the Secondary School Reading portion of the Sequence, ten require the student to prove his mastery of the learning package by passing an objective test. To provide for these tests, a testing center is open approximately twenty-five hours per week, during which time a student may take any of the objective tests available in reading or in any other portion of the Sequence. Tests are scored by computer, and an IBM printout is posted to show the results. Other evaluations in reading include analyzing and evaluating a secondary reading test, finding the readability of certain secondary material, locating high-interest books, and making a lesson plan which incorporates assignment-readiness, SQ3R skills, and reading study skills. These latter evaluations are scored by the team Reading specialist, who then gives feedback directly to the student.

Conclusion

The reading preparation program at Illinois State University represents a fundamental shift in the instructional focus for preparation of secondary level preservice teachers. Essentially, this competency-based program offers the preservice teacher the opportunity to acquire the knowledge and skills relative to working with secondary school reading problems within a framework that is self-paced and largely self-directive. While the program is still relatively new, its theoretical base has had considerable impact on the development of new instructional approaches in both the public school and the university domain. Such a transition from a course centered structure has not been without its

problem? This new program requires and is receiving constant attention and revision with respect to the scope of instructional objectives, desirable learning activities, alternative sensory approaches, and ways of facilitating equitable evaluations.